

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 0333

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TAGS: CASC CARR SHUM CU CDES

SUBJ: CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ ON U.S. PRISONERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: STATE 205728

1. I HAD MY FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ, POLITBURO MEMBER AND A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE, DURING GOC RECEPTION OCTOBER 9 IN HONOR OF VISITING PRESIDENT OF MOZAMBIQUE. RODRIGUEZ REITERATED NOW FAMILIAR COMMENT THAT THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE HAVE NEVER HARBORED ANIMOSITY TOWARD THE AMERICAN PEOPLE DESPITE SERIOUS GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT PROBLEMS, AND THAT NEW DEPARTURE IN OFFICIAL RELATIONS REFLECTED IN OPENING OF INTERESTS SECTIONS IS WELCOMED. HE OBSERVED THAT OFFICIAL DIALOGUE WILL BE HELPFUL BUT THAT OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS CAN BE DEALT WITH ONLY OVER TIME. HE MENTIONED PROGRESS OF PANAMA CANAL TREATY AS ONE CONSTRAINT ON US.

2. CONVERSATION THEN TURNED TO TOPIC OF US CITIZENS, INCLUDING PRISONERS. WE AGREED THAT REPATRIATION OF FIRST GROUP OF AMCIT-HEADED FAMILIES LAST MONTH HAD BEEN WELL-RECEIVED AND THAT THESE MOVEMENTS SHOULD CONTINUE. WITH RESPECT TO AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS, RODRIGUEZ VOLUNTEERED THAT RAFAEL DEL PINO (REFTEL) DID INDEED COMMIT SUICIDE IN JAIL (WE HAVE STILL NOT RECEIVED CONFIRMATION OF THIS FROM GOC IN RESPONSE TO OUR INQUIRY BY DIPLOMATIC
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NOTE; I SUGGEST THAT DEPARTMENT INFORM NEXT OF KIN ONLY THAT WE HAVE CONFIRMATION OF DEATH FROM RELIABLE SOURCE BUT ARE AWAITING OFFICIAL REPORT). RODRIGUEZ COMMENTED THAT THIS DEATH WAS TRAGIC AS IS ANY DEATH, BUT THAT IN ONE SENSE IT MAY HAVE BEEN FOR THE BEST SINCE THERE WAS LITTLE CHANCE THAT DEL PINO WOULD HAVE BEEN RELEASED EARLY GIVEN THE SERIOUSNESS OF HIS OFFENSE, NAMELY THAT HE BETRAYED FIDEL IN MEXICO AND JEOPARDIZED THE ENTIRE REVOLUTION.

3. RODRIGUEZ WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE CASE OF LARRY LUNT IS ALSO VERY DIFFICULT. HE MENTIONED THE SPECIAL BELGIAN INTEREST IN LUNT, WHICH I ACKNOWLEDGED BUT GAVE NO SUGGESTION THAT CASE WILL BE RESOLVED--AS THE BELGIAN AMBASSADOR SEEMS TO EXPECT--BEFORE THE LATTER IS TRANSFERRED NEXT YEAR.

4. THE CASES OF THE OTHER POLITICAL PRISONERS, RODRIGUEZ SAID, WERE NOT SO DIFFICULT, AND WOULD PRESUMABLY BE RESOLVED OVER TIME. HE SUGGESTED TO ME CLEARLY THAT THIS WOULD BE PART OF THE PROCESS OF OVERALL POLITICAL RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN CUBA AND THE UNITED STATES.

5. TURNING TO THE BROADER TOPIC OF HUMAN RIGHTS, RODRIGUEZ ARGUED THE DESPITE DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, CUBA IS CLOSE IN CONCEPT AND PRACTICE TO THE HIGH STANDARDS ESPOUSED BY PRESIDENT CARTER. HE SAID THAT THE POLITICAL PRISONERS BEING HELD IN CUBA ARE SERIOUS OFFENDERS, BUT THAT THEY ARE WELL TREATED AND THERE ARE MANY FEWER THAN IS FREQUENTLY ALLEGED OUTSIDE CUBA. HE CLAIMED FORCEFULLY THAT PRISONERS ARE NOT TORTURED IN CUBA, THAT THEY DO NOT DISAPPEAR AS IN SOME OTHER COUNTRIES, AND THAT THEY ARE IN FACT CONSTANTLY ALTHOUGH QUIETLY BEING RELEASED AS THEY ARE DETERMINED TO POSE NO FURTHER DANGER TO THE STATE. IN THIS CONNECTION, RODRIGUEZ SAID HE HAD FOR SOME TIME BEEN SEEKING A FORMULA WHICH, WHILE NOT CONTRAVENTING FIDEL CASTRO'S WELL-KNOWN DICTUM AGAINST ALLOWING OUTSIDE INSPECTIONS IN CUBA, CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD ALLOW SOME RESPECTED NON-GOVERNMENTAL GROUP TO VISIT THE COUNTRY AND SEE FOR ITSELF WHAT THE SITUATION REALLY IS. I TOLD HIM THAT I THOUGHT THIS WAS AN EXCELLENT IDEA AND COULD BE VERY HELPFUL. IF THE DEPARTMENT HAS ANY SUGGESTIONS AS TO A PARTICULAR GROUP THAT MIGHT BE BOTH RESPONSIBLE AND ACCEPTABLE TO CUBA, I MIGHT HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY AT A LATER DATE TO PASS THEM ON; THE GREATER DIFFICULTY FOR RODRIGUEZ, HOWEVER, IS CLEARLY TO DISTINGUISH SUCH A VISIT FROM AN "INSPECTION".

6. COMMENT: RODRIGUEZ WAS EXTREMELY CORDIAL AND OPEN, AND OBVIOUSLY HAD NO PROBLEM WITH BEING SEEN TALKING PRIVATELY WITH ME FOR SEVERAL MINUTES IN THE MIDST OF A HUGE RECEPTION. BASED ON A FRANK APOLOGY VOLUNTEERED BY RODRIGUEZ AT ONE STATE IN THE CONVERSATION OVER THE INORDINATE DELAYS OF THE CUBAN DIPLOMATIC MACHINERY IN ANSWERING OUR INQUIRIES, I AM HOPEFUL THAT WE MAY HAVE DEFINITE REPLIES SOON TO STANDING REQUESTS FOR A REPORT ON DEL PINO AND FOR CONSULAR VISITS TO ALL THE AMERICAN PRISONERS.
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